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JFK death questions linger

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Twelve years ago today President John F. Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas, exploding what had been a rather serene, pleasant day into the depths of tragedy and turmoil.

The physical aspects of that tragedy have somewhat subsided through these dozen years, but the emotion and turmoil rage on.

Many people, perhaps most people, believe that the assassination of the 46-year-old Kennedy was part of a conspiracy — a vast plot that might

have included officials and agencies once held in high esteem.

The seven-man investigation body formed eight days after the assassination (and generally called The Warren Commission because former Chief Justice Earl Warren was its chairman) found after thousands of interviews, scores of technical tests and several months of deliberation and hearings that Kennedy was killed by a young dissident named Lee Harvey Oswald.

The manner in which that Commission carried out its assigned duties, the secrecy with which it locked up some

of its work papers and materials, the refusal to deal strongly with key witnesses, plus the input of a coterie of personally-motivated "critics," made the report suspect in many circles almost as soon as it emerged from the U.S. Government printing office.

The Warren probbers castigated the FBI for what it considered its ineffectual role. Though Oswald did not qualify at that time under that agency's official mandate as a man who should have been watched as a potential assassin, the Commission indicated strongly that the FBI should

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have at least given the Secret Service and the Dallas police the information that a Russian defector and a proclaimed Marxist worked along the motorcade route.

Over the years it became quite lucrative to write books, movies and plays — almost all of them alluding to an alleged conspiracy and Warren Commission "coverup."

By now much of this smoke might have subsided had it not been for the disclosures of wrongdoing and government coverup in Watergate, wiretapping of private citizens, character

assassination by agencies against "troublemakers" and actual participation of our government's agencies in foreign assassinations and political coups.

The spectre of all this — which spotlighted a kind of national morality crisis and prompted a re-evaluation even in the most trusting eyes, has once again made all the rumors of a Kennedy assassination conspiracy and coverup all the more believable to many Americans.

Then, just earlier this year The Dallas Times Herald reported for the

first time that Oswald had actually visited the Dallas FBI offices a few days before Kennedy was killed and left a threatening note for an agent. The FBI admitted this happened.

This gesture by Oswald probably meant nothing as far as the investigation of his role in the assassination was concerned, but once again it fueled rumors of coverup because the bureau in an admitted "don't embarrass the bureau" posture, destroyed the note and did not inform the Warren probbers about it.

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Partly as a result of that admission on the Oswald note and partly because Congress has heard horror stories about FBI and CIA activities during the past decade, several congressional committees now seem gearing up to investigate at least portions of the Warren Commission conclusions.

Sen. Richard Schweiker, R-Pa., who with Sen. Gary Hart, D-Col., comprises a House subcommittee investigating the FBI and CIA relationships with the Warren investigation, says definitely he believes Oswald had "intelligence ties."

"All the fingerprints are there," Schweiker told The Times Herald recently, "and those fingerprints lead to Lee Harvey Oswald. I think it's certain he had ties with either the CIA or FBI."

Sen. Schweiker hopes to hold hearings and call witnesses who could testify about key issues in this area.

"We have subpoena power," Schweiker said, "and we intend to use it. We intend to find out all there is to know about it."

He further hopes that findings of his

subcommittee can eventually lead to a more complete rehashing of the whole Kennedy assassination by a special Senate committee.

So, the controversy goes on.

Mayor Wes Wise Friday placed a wreath of red, white and blue carnations inside the Kennedy Memorial near where the President was shot, calling the martyred leader "a pillar of courage, a trusted leader and champion of civil liberty."

"In the few years of his presidency," Wise added, "America faced the gauntlet of foreign hostility and the internal conflicts of a nation learning to be free. These were trying years but they were not characterized by despondency. For President Kennedy gave us hope in a stronger and brighter future."

Hundreds of visitors will likely make what has become an annual pilgrimage to the site today. Only a handful were on hand for Wise's brief appearance Friday.

Dallas, originally cast as a villain for what emotional people called "its role" in the assassination, no longer comes in for the vilification once heaped upon it.

But that is about the only real change in a dozen long years.

DOWNTOWN STAFF